New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1945

Volume VI, Number 20 • Yearly Subscription $15.00 • Week of December 3, 1945

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Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"Strange Fruit"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 30, 1945

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Diffuse Pungence

LILLIAN SMITH'S somber novel of black and white folk in the deep South has been made into a sprawling, but absorbing play. "Strange Fruit" has rich dramatic substance as it recounts the ill-starred mating of a white man and a colored girl in the heart of Georgia. Like "Deep Are the Roots," it is a savagely restrained commentary on racial barriers and intolerance. At times the tragedy at the Royale achieves poignant heights. With the fine acting in this Jose Ferrer production, it has a restless eloquence which is good to see in the theater. It is still an ungainly piece of stagecraft, losing its focus in a huge cast and a diffused exposition.

* * *

Miss Smith, with the assistance of her sister, Esther, has tried to shape too much of her book into the play version. The twelve scenes of the work rarely fail to hold one's interest, but their progression is somewhat confusing, their import sometimes extraneous, and their cumulative effect less dynamic and forceful than one might have wished. There are vivid fragments of a fine drama at the Royale, but they have a way of eluding a unified dramatic pattern. The love affair of a doctor's son and a serene Negro girl is told with sympathy and power. Unfortunately, it becomes smothered by a slew of other relationships and issues.

* * *

The tabooed romance of the white boy and the colored girl comes across the footlights with a touching tragic insistence and infinite taste. As performed by Melchor Ferrer and Jane White, it forms a curiously moving core to the drama. The former is splendid in the sincerity of his love and the inherent weakness which makes him forsake it. Miss White brings a genuine nobility to her portrayal of the proudly bewildered youngster who accepts devotion with all her heart and its certain fate with numb understanding. "Strange Fruit" would have been better had it centered more completely on them and their destiny.

* * *

As it is, the Misses Smith have brought a whole community onto a stage. There are striking characters in its midst, particularly a wise mill owner, played trenchantly by Ralph Theadore, and a Negro doctor, enacted superbly by Juano Hernandez, who try to avert the lynching of the climax. A flashback to the hero's boyhood, when he first learns the gulf made by different skin pigmentation, is well done, and there is an effective scene between a revival preacher, nicely portrayed by Stephen Chase, and the doctor's son. The piece abounds with vivid bit characterizations. They do not always keep it hewing to its tragic line. For all of Ferrer's canny staging and excellent settings by George Jenkins, "Strange Fruit" is a gangling drama, making its theatrical points by the sheer power of its central situation. At least it is a show to make one sit up and take notice.

"Strange Fruit"

A play version of Lillian Smith's novel prepared by the author with the assistance of Esther Smith. Presented by Jose Ferrer last night at the Royale Theatre. Staged by Mr. Ferrer. Settings by George Jenkins. Costumes by Patricia Montgomery. Production under the supervision of Arthur S. Friend.

THE CAST:

A Mill Hand	Murray Hamilton
Another Mill Hand	Robert Doppett
Ed Anderson	George B. Oliver
Little Miss Nobody	Doris Block
Preacher Dunwoodie	Stephen Chase
Tom Harris	Ralph Theadore
Dee Cassidy	Ted Yaryan
Gabe	Alonzo Bosan
Doug	Jay Norris
Harriet Harris	Eugenia Rawls
Charlie Harris	Francis Leiton
Tracy Deen	Melchor Ferrer
Crazy Carl	Robinson Stone
Alma Deen	Vera Allen
Sam Perry	Juano Hernandez
Laura Deen	Charlotte Keane
Tut Deen	Frank Tweddell
Corporal	Herbert Junior
Nonnie Anderson	Jane White
Bess Anderson	Dorothy Carter
Jackie (Bess' child)	Juan Jose Hernandez
Henry McIntosh	Earl Jones
Salamander	Hanson W. Elkins
Chuck	Ralph Meeker
Miss Sadie	Mary Fletcher
Miss Belle	Esther Smith
Mamie McIntosh	Edna Thomas
Tracy Deen (as a child)	Peter Griffith
Henry McIntosh (as a child)	Richard W. Williams
A Little Girl	Phyllis De Bus
Laura Deen (as a child)	Betty Lou Keim
Ten McIntosh	Ken Renard
A Colored Man	Ellsworth Wright
A Maid	Doris Block

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 30, 1945

'Strange Fruit' Splendidly Staged, Honestly Written—But Episodic

By JOHN CHAPMAN

With the opening at the Royale last night of "Strange Fruit" there now are two dramas about the conflicting lives of Negroes and whites in the deep South. The first of them, "Deep Are the Roots," has been one of the few hits of the season. The second of them—last night's play—is much the better in its sincerity, in the quality of its writing and in the staging of individual scenes.

Yet, because of these scenes—twelve of them in all, and quite magically designed—"Strange Fruit" is the weaker as a commercial piece for the theatre. It is an admirable attempt to put upon the stage a much-discussed novel, but it lacks the suspense, the dramatic carry-over, to weld these dozen episodes into a satisfying whole.

Jose Ferrer, the actor last seen here as Iago in "Othello," makes his bow as a producer with "Strange Fruit." It is not a modest, tentative first venture, but a production whose size, physical complexity and obvious great cost are notable. Mr. Ferrer also has directed the drama, and has done much of it superbly. His insistence upon a quiet naturalness in almost every scene, however, is partly responsible for the lack of cumulative effect which, at the end, leaves the play without a knockout punch.

Honest, Not Sensational.

I have not read the novel and can therefore report only upon its dramatization. Disappointment will be in store for anyone looking for sensation, dirt or controversy. "Strange Fruit" is an honest work about race relations. In it there is miscegenation—the love of a white man for a colored woman; but this affection is made believable, sincere and moving, and is therefore far removed from sensationalism.

Lillian Smith, author of the book, has made the stage adaptation with the assistance of her sister, Esther Smith. Any one of their twelve episodes is good writing for the theatre, for the characters are clearly limned as individuals, they talk convincingly, they have emotion, and when they get through saying what they have to say they remain quiet.

The story is of Tracy Deen's love for Nonnie Anderson, and the tragic results thereof. It tells of Tracy's unhappy realization that he cannot thus cross the line in a Georgia town, and of his reluctant renunciation of this love. It tells of his murder at the hands of Nonnie's brother, and of the lynching of another negro for this killing.

Ends on a Note of Hope.

It tells of the true affection that can be felt between whites and Negroes—men and men, children and children, men and women—and of the inescapable difference which sooner or later imposes itself and prevents the affection from being lasting or complete. "Strange Fruit" offers no solution for the race problem, but it offers hope. One of the fine white men in the play, a courageous and striving friend of the Negro, will not admit defeat even when the lynching occurs. "We can," he says at the end, "keep on trying."

There are many admirable performances, both in principal roles and in bits. As the lovers, Melchor Ferrer and Jane White play with a brooding restraint which sets the tragic key of the drama. Ralph Theadore is splendid as the friend of the Negro who will not give up hope, and Juano Hernandez portrays a colored doctor honestly and effectively. Earl Jones, as the house-boy who becomes the innocent lynch victim, is extraordinarily touching and pathetically funny.

George Jenkins' settings, including a drug store, cabins, porches, homes, an office and outdoor scenes, are remarkable. Stage hands made some noise behind the backdrops last night, but they soon should have things stacked properly and working quietly. Mr. Jenkins has set them a hard task and I cannot exactly blame them for last night's interruptions.

PM

NOVEMBER 30, 1945

—Kronenberger—

Less Power Than Purpose

Lillian Smith has been as fearless and forthright in the play she has made of *Strange Fruit* as she was in the novel. The pity is that she has lacked a skill to match her sincerity; that, despite some good scenes and powerful moments, *Strange Fruit* just doesn't add up to a good play. No more, on the whole, does it add up to good theater. It suffers from an undeveloped dramatic sense, from inexpert story-telling, from blurred focussing; and in particular from trying to provide a picture of a whole town inside the cramping framework of the stage.

The great potential merit of *Strange Fruit* is that, with its interlocking problems and expanding situations, it has so much of importance to say. But that in turn provides a great potential danger—of discovering how to say it. Miss Smith has not, on the whole, discovered it. She has made many of her points, in passing; but she has not fused her material. She has here and there created a dramatic scene, but she has not achieved the tensions that make for sustained drama. The content of *Strange Fruit* is much too disturbing and tragic not to exert its own kind of pressure on all of us who feel as Miss Smith does. But the play itself brings little force of its own to bear on that content; it is hard to believe that, by itself, it will arouse those who need to be aroused.

• • •

Strange Fruit, as you know, broadens out from the unhappy love story of a Georgia white boy and Negro girl into a panoramic drama of rooted prejudice and ghastly injustice. The larger picture is always implicit in the smaller, and though Miss Smith's plot faultily shifts emphasis from one set of characters to another, it is yet quite free from the contrivances of a *Deep Are the Roots*. *Strange Fruit* is, indeed, based on much thoroughter understanding and observation. But by being sprawlingly projected instead of tightly contrived, it is much less electrical or even expressive. The love story itself is unfolded in rather weak and colorless scenes. And the character of the boy, of the well-meaning but flabby Tracy Deen, which is the *moral* crux of the story, is not well realized. The product of environmental forces, Tracy succumbs to them with too little inner emotion; while the girl Nonnie remains appealing but negative—a sort of Desdemona in reverse.

And in moving from the personal tragedy of the Negro who is denied happiness into the social tragedy of the Negro who is denied equality, opportunity and the barest justice, Miss Smith cannot achieve any continuity. Dealing, as she does, with an entire town, she has to devote much of her first act to straight exposition. This makes for flatness; and thereafter the variety of matters that have to be handled makes for jumpiness. For two or three scenes the second act starts to build, then loses its tension in the weak first scene after the murder, and only once recovers it before the end. Actually—in contrast to what you would expect—it is in didactic moments rather than dramatic ones that *Strange Fruit* is at its best. Two or three times with a sharp incident or an eloquent speech, *Strange Fruit* crystallizes into meaning and emotion.

• • •

Offered in 12 scenes, *Strange Fruit* is further hampered in its flow by the sheer mechanics of production. Otherwise the production is a helpful one. Mr. Ferrer has directed carefully, and in general the cast is a good one. Jane White makes a touching Nonnie and Melchor Ferrer a believable Tracy. In smaller parts, Juano Hernandez, Earl Jones and Ralph Theadore are particularly good; and Stephen Chase, Dorothy Carter and others are very competent. George Jenkins' sets are for the most part excellent. —LOUIS KRONENBERGER

New York Post

NOVEMBER 30, 1945

Strange Fruit' Loses Force in Dramatization

By Wilella Waldorf

Even a fair to middling play version of Lillian Smith's novel, "Strange Fruit," is probably better than no play version at all, but we can't help feeling that it's a great pity Jose Ferrer, producer and director; George Jenkins, a talented scenic designer, and the large cast of for the most part well selected actors couldn't have had a better script to work with last night at the Royale Theatre.

"Strange Fruit," a book that had something to say about the treatment of Negroes in the deep South, and said it uncommonly well, should have been made into a far more effective drama than the rambling affair that felt its way rather haltingly across the Royale stage last night.

Obviously the author of the novel feels very strongly about everything she discussed in her book, but she is no dramatist, and neither, apparently, is her sister Esther, listed in the program as her assistant. Not only is "Strange Fruit" cluttered and overlong. It is sometimes painfully undramatic. Miss Smith tortures herself trying to cram the tragic story of Tracy Deen, the white boy who loved Nonnie Anderson, a Negro girl, into only twelve scenes, and one has a feeling as the evening goes on that she has blue-penciled favorite stretches here and there against her will and in great agony of soul.

The fact is, a good dramatist, given free rein, could have made a stronger play out of "Strange Fruit" with much less travail and scene shifting, and at the same time succeeded in getting Miss Smith's message over in clearer, more forceful fashion.

But the author herself took on the job, and apparently it was up to Mr. Ferrer to accept her handiwork and do what he could with the individual scenes as they came along. One or two of them are rendered dramatically potent by stretches of good dialogue spoken by actors who know their jobs, and since we happen to have read the book, we had little difficulty in straightening out the characters and filling in the background that often seemed unnecessarily confused.

Miss Smith is actually trying to dramatize a whole Southern town, and she might, alas! have been much more selective about it. There are too many actors and too many details in "Strange Fruit" on the stage. All too often Mr. Ferrer, as director, seems to be more of a traffic control officer than anything else.

On the other hand, George Jenkins' settings are a great help to the proceedings and young Melchor Ferrer is well cast and often most affecting as Tracy. Especially appealing, too, is Earl Jones as the Negro boy, Henry McIntosh, with whom Tracy grew up. Jane White plays Nonnie with a quiet simplicity that is well suited to the role, while Dorothy Carter as her sister Bess and Juano Hernandez as Sam Perry, the Negro physician, are very helpful, as is the reliable Ralph Theadore as Tom Harris, a white man who isn't afraid to act like a Christian. Stephen Chase speaks his piece as the revival minister well enough to make most people slightly ill, which is, of course, just what the author ordered.

There's still enough strength and fundamental truth in this story to interest a public that cares to think, and Mr. Ferrer has seen to it that the production is in excellent taste. "Strange Fruit" is never cheap, but is always executed with care and intelligence. It is regrettable that what might have been a searing drama emerges in the theatre merely as a series of episodes adding up to something considerably less impressive than the original novel.

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 30, 1945

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

It is a disagreeable truth, but Lillian Smith has not made a satisfactory play of "Strange Fruit." In adapting her own famous novel, with the assistance of her sister, she has had the best of intentions, but apparently has lacked the experience in a new form. "Strange Fruit," as it went on last evening at the Royale, is sprawling and too much of its length is verbose; only a few of its many scenes carry the tragedy and the anger which ran through the book. It is a play which hits hard only occasionally.

* * *

In setting forth the story for the stage Miss Smith and her associate follow the novel's course. The weak young Southern white man is in love with the Negro girl until his upbringing and outside pressure make him conclude the relationship is wrong. He hires his house boy to marry the girl, that her child may have a name, a convenience she refuses. The girl's brother kills the white man and escapes; a mob lynches the Negro boy, thinking he had been guilty of murder—or if not, that some Negro must atone.

Where the adaptation is moving or strong it is extremely so. In a discussion of racial equality between a Negro doctor and a liberal white mill-owner, the play minces no words. Some of the passages between the girl and the white youth are given with restraint and are touching. But the Misses Smith also have cluttered up their play with a good many characters who are unessential; they have far too many scenes. The part of the white boy is a loosely contrived figure—weak, confused, swayed in any direction—and his lack of strength makes a special case of what "Strange Fruit" basically means as a general one.

* * *

The play is built as a study of racial inequality, with the love story as the continuing thread. Unfortunately it pauses along the way to take up other matters. World problems are considered, along with religion and labor, and the authors have a tendency to stack the cards. As it has been staged by José Ferrer, who also is the producer, the play sometimes takes on the aspect of a pageant, with people coming on from the wings, saying a few words and then going off again. "Strange Fruit" wanders, when its strength should lie in a straight path.

In her Broadway debut, Jane White is quite touching as the Negro girl who is in love and proud. Melchor Ferrer is the white boy, and sometimes appears to overdo the flabby features of Tracy Deen. There is an excellent performance by Juano Hernandez as the Negro doctor, who has come back to the South to help his people, and another by Ralph Theadore as the mill owner. Stephen Chase is the preacher — not a pleasant figure—and Earl Jones, the house boy. George Jenkins has designed the settings of a Southern house, a cabin, drugstore and the other places in which the dozen scenes are placed.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 30, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

With Best of Intentions 'Strange Fruit' Is a Bore

There is some mighty fine acting in Lillian Smith's "Strange Fruit," which Jose Ferrer presented at the Royale last night. The sets by George Jenkins are atmospheric and authentic inland Georgian. Miss Smith knows her milieu and the people in it, white, black and mulatto. She has a fine earnestness and a clear head about the problem facing the whites and the Negroes in the South.

But, alas, Miss Smith has even less skill as a dramatist than she has as a novelist. Her novel, which was nb more than run-of-the-mill, journeyman's stuff as fiction, achieved a fortuitous notoriety by being banned in Boston for a very childish reason. Its miscegenation theme is a more than thrice-told tale of a clandestine love affair between a Negro and a white person, which ends in a tragedy wherein an innocent Negro is lynched by a sadistic gang of hoodlums and poor white trash. Miss Smith's only variation in the lynching theme is that of having the lynchers, with one exception, hard-working and respectable mill-hands.

A Familiar Theme.

The theme was dealt with in a much more dramatic manner by T. S. Stribling in "Teeftallow," as long ago as 1926 and again in a much more effective way last year by a Louisiana novelist whose name and the title of whose book escapes me at the moment and whose work enjoyed neither the advantage of being banned in Boston or of being named the book-of-the-month by a mail order subscription firm, and so was unadvertised, not widely reviewed and quickly forgotten. By the way, "Teeftallow" was dramatized and shown on Broadway under the title of "Rope," in 1928, with very disastrous results at the box office.

In "Strange Fruit," a maladjusted veteran of World War I and son of a prominent and benevolent doctor in Maxwell, Ga., falls so deeply in love with a Negro girl he had known since they were children together that he cannot settle down to a career or take any interest in the white girl he is engaged to.

The Negro girl loves him also and is happy when she learns she is going to bear him a child. He is not. The prospect so arouses his own sense of sin that he joins a Protestant church, renounces the girl, and is killed by the girl's brother (who had been up North and gotten some hot-headed ideas) on his way home from the girl's home. He had paid his father's houseboy $100 to marry the girl in order to give the child a name.

Way of the South.

The houseboy is a gentle, clumsy, not-very-bright Negro, who would not harm anyone. Nevertheless as the saying is in some parts of the South, when a white man is mysteriously murdered a Negro must die. And the houseboy had been seen in a Negro eating-house the night of the murder, drunk and flourishing a hundred dollars in bills. Everyone among the peaceful and decent citizens of the town knows that the houseboy did not commit the murder and also knows, or suspects, who did it and why; but none of them except an old mill owner has the courage to defy the mob. His efforts are too late.

The basic problem of the main theme—that of the love of the white boy and the Negro girl—you see, is evaded, or at least it is only resolved by the familiar and, in this case, mechanical means of introducing quite another theme, namely, that of the responsibility of decent and law-abiding whites and blacks for permitting lynching and other miscarriages of justice out of apathy or fear of mobs. The play has several effective scenes, but no emotional drive or build-up. There are two climaxes, both of which are really anticlimaxes. The dramatic flow is lethargic.

The acting triumph of the evening was scored by Earl Jones as the clumsy houseboy. Mr. Jones, a Mississippi-born social worker, who began as an actor in the Suitcase Theater and was last seen as Blossom in "The Hasty Heart," is immensely appealing and an actor of wide range of invention. But the whole very large cast, under Mr. Ferrer's direction, is good, special honors going to Jane White, as the white boy's Negro sweetheart; to Juano Hernandez, as a Negro physician with a university degree, educated by a white man, and the sort of honored, pacific and diplomatic gentleman whom the more recalcitrant Negro hotheads in the South call a "white man's nigger;" to Edna Thomas, as the old servant who is the houseboy's mother; to Ralph Theadore, as the courageous mill owner; to Melchor Ferrer, as the white boy in the case, and to Eugenia Rawls and Frank Tweddell.

It is a shame that with acting so good, sets so fine, author's characterizations so well established and purpose so high, the evening at "Strange Fruit," for the most part, should be such a listless bore.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

The Sun

NOVEMBER 30, 1945

'Strange Fruit' Offers Good Acting in an Awkward and Disjointed Drama.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Lillian Smith's best-selling novel, "Strange Fruit," now transferred to the theater, comes forth as an awkward and inexpert play, lacking in sustained force and continuity. Jose Ferrer, who has worked long and patiently on the production, brought it into the Royale last night.

"Strange Fruit," a drama of violence and miscegenation, is well played. In the playing, as well as in the writing, it captures the feeling of its locale, the drowsy town of Maxwell, Ga., in your time and mine. The characters are believable enough. But the dramatization, done by Miss Smith, with the assistance of Esther Smith, has resulted in a play that comes to life only occasionally. It is too long, too jumbled, too straggling.

An additional handicap is a cumbersome mechanical production which necessitates waits between scene changes, bringing on a consequent loss of mood, and providing no end of backstage commotion as scenes are being played. Perhaps these physical handicaps can be corrected. The real trouble lies in the job of playwriting that the first author of Clayton, Ga., has done—or didn't do.

"Strange Fruit" is played in two acts and twelve scenes. The story of the play closely follows that of the book. Tracy Deen, weak and futile son of the town doctor, is engaged in a love affair of long standing with a beautiful and educated Negro girl, Nonnie Anderson. Her companionship in their meetings at the gate of her house and beneath the yellow pines on the ridge has brought to him sympathy and understanding that he has not found elsewhere. But when she becomes pregnant he turns against her, offers her money, and tries to get Henry, his hulking body servant, devoted to him since childhood, to marry her. Nonnie's brother learns of the situation and kills Tracy. He is put safely aboard a train for the North. But the mob in Maxwell, mill hands and all the others, must have its victim. The innocent Henry is lynched.

There are some excellent atmospheric touches in the Royale's new play—the voices of the revival singers heard faintly through the pines, the cackling of gossiping villagers in the drugstore and along College street, the lounging of the Negroes in the cafe of old man Salamander, dried up like a tobacco leaf. There are strong scenes here and there, such as that when a Negro doctor cries out against the injustices done his race. But much of the material used in the dramatization fails in providing good theater. And a long evening is made to seem longer by the clumsy handling of the fine realistic settings of George Jenkins.

Several performances are outstanding, including those of Juana Hernandez, playing a Negro doctor who lives in Maxwell for the good of his race; Ralph Theadore, as a mill owner, who tries to prevent the lynching, and Dorothy Carter as Bess Anderson, a character well done in the book and in the play. Jane White has the right quality for Nonnie, whose dignity comes from within. The role, however, is sketchily written. Melchoir Ferrer gives the proper feeling of weakness in Tracy Deen, who turns to religion when trouble begins to pile up. There are good performances from Earl Jones, Frank Tweddell, Stephen Chase, Vera Allen, Eugenia Rawls and Edna Thomas.

"Strange Fruit," staged by Jose Ferrer, is a disjointed play and, in total effect, lacking in the qualities needed to make the dramatization a successful one.

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Journal American

NOVEMBER 30, 1945

'Strange Fruit' Opens At Royale Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

If sincerity were all that is needed to transform a best-selling novel into a best-selling play, Lillian Smith's dramatization of her own "Strange Fruit" would be the most successful theatrical offering in New York today. It is, I fear, nothing of the kind. Instead, it is an honest yet ineffectual attempt to create one illusion in terms of another, to pretend that a library and a theatre are the same.

In the making of anything, be it orange marmalade or a good impression, sincerity isn't everything. This is particularly true in the making of a play. Although I've not read the controversial novel from which last night's "Strange Fruit" is made, I'm assured that it is written with an honesty of purpose that no one can possibly deny. Well, so is the undramatic narrative up on the Royale's stage.

Yet, in spite of its sincerity, in spite of all the best intentions in the world, "Strange Fruit" remains exactly where the theatre found it. The theatre found it between the covers of a book. To read it may be to weep. But to hear it is to be unmoved. You feel, somehow, that Miss Smith's ugly story of the deep South and its shallow Southerners is being read out loud to you. This shouldn't be!

• • •

Always Sincere

Nowanights, in 45th st., 34 characters and at least a dozen scenes are consumed before the right man is shot, the wrong man is lynched and Tom Harris, ruminating in his office at the mill, is sorry like a Southerner for the whole unhappy business which has just come to a climax at the fashionable end of Tobacco Road.

What, in a novel, must be a touching and tragic tale of intolerance, ignorance and miscegenation, is, in a play, a contrived, conversational and unconvincing story of a rich bad man, a poor good girl and the poor good girl's avenging brother. The color-line, directly responsible for the bleakness of it all, is practically forgotten as the Georgian melodrama goes conventionally on its way.

If, having read the novel, you know Tracy Deen, Nonnie Anderson and Nonnie Anderson's brother Ed, you're more familiar with their tastes, their distastes and their inheritances than I, as a playgoer in search of a play, can hope to be in the presence of last night's arrival. To a playgoer in search of a play, "Strange Fruit" is sprawling, talkative and confused. But, of course, it's sincere.

• • •

Never a Play

Under the actorial direction of Jose Ferrer, who is also the producer, a stage full of actors indulges in an evening full of underacting. Nobody raises a voice, a hand or an emotion if it possibly can be avoided. Consequently, everything that does happen gives the impression of happening elsewhere. Which, as a matter of fact, it all too frequently does. Thanks to the author.

Even so, Melchor Ferrer is strong in his weakness, weak in his strength as Tracy Dean. He should be! Jane White is tenderly tragic as the Nonnie Anderson who has not been done right by. And Earl Jones urges you to laugh with tears in your eyes as Henry McIntosh. You may remember him in last season's "The Hasty Heart." It's Juano Hernandez, I think, who is most impressive as the Negro doctor.

Effective in their "Dark of the Moon"-ish way, George Jenkins' overly detailed backgrounds do no little swaying, rumbling and cluttering-up before the evening's over. But when they're simple, they're very good indeed...But "Strange Fruit," re-written for the theatre by Lillian Smith, is never a play, no matter how hard it tries to be. It's a spoken narrative. And I don't know how to review a spoken narrative, no matter if it is sincere!

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

"The Mermaids Singing"

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 29, 1945

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Since it plainly would be indecent for one man to have three outstanding plays running on Broadway at the same time, John van Druten may be pardoned his Homeric nod. "The Mermaids Singing," which Alfred de Liagre Jr. offered at the Empire last evening, is no "Voice of the Turtle," nor is it another "I Remember Mama." To get right along with the matter, it is, indeed, second-best van Druten and, to boot, a somewhat forced and tedious evening in the theatre. It is a play which seems never to get going, which is cluttered up with assorted extraneous characters and which talks itself into a state of complete lassitude.

Mr. van Druten again is studying extra-marital affairs, a topic of not limited interest. His chief character is a successful playwright who is trying his new show out of town. He falls into conversation with a young couple during a performance, invites them for a drink and presently is seeing a good deal of the girl, a lady of 20. She says she is in love with him, he has said that an occasional affair keeps life interesting, so they wonder what they shall do about their mutual attraction. Keeping it clean, they do nothing. The playwright can promise nothing but a temporary arrangement if the girl follows him to New York; she, powdering her nose, goes down to the hotel bar to take up again with her young man.

When his typewriter has a new ribbon, Mr. van Druten can write not only crisp, bright lines, but he can give his characters a human, warm quality. While some of the lines of "The Mermaids Singing" have the first quality, and are very funny about it, he has not given enough thought to his characters. His playwright is neither a heel, a cynic, a sentimentalist; there is no proof that the girl has fallen in love with him, or has been dazzled by a celebrity or simply wants to go to New York. She says it is love, but the statement is Mr. van Druten's and is open to proof.

Unlike "The Voice of the Turtle," which has practically no actors at all, "The Mermaids Singing" has far too many. There are waiters, neighbors, friends and people well-met in bars, who come on, say a few lines, slow the story and then go out again. It is as though Mr. van Druten, knowing there is considerable solemn conversation going on, wishes to liven up the evening; the rewards, unfortunately, are negative. When a thin and wispy little plot begins to run down, it takes more than a scene with a drunk, or a dinner in the suburbs, to wind it up again.

* * *

Of the players, Beatrice Pearson gives a very nice performance as the young girl. She is fresh and suggests a quality of wistfulness and offers the part far more than there seems basically to be in it. Walter Abel is the playwright, offering the bland side of a successful author on tryout in Boston or Philadelphia, but not finding enough in the character to make it a complete figure. Frieda Inescort is the girl's mother, Jane Hoffman is amusing as a gabby friend of the mother and Lois Wilson has the role of an actress who has been burned often by love or its variations. Raymond Sovey designed the settings and Mr. van Druten directed.

'THE MERMAIDS SINGING.'

Play by John van Druten; settings by Raymond Sovey; staged by Van Druten; presented by Alfred de Liagre Jr. at the Empire Theater, Wednesday, November 28, 1945. The cast:

Clement Waterlow	Walter Abel
George	Arthur Griffin
Bertha Corrigan	Lois Wilson
Thad Gresila	Walter Starkey
Dee Matthews	Beatrice Pearson
Mrs. James	Jane Hoffman
Mrs. Matthews	Frieda Inescort
Professor James	Harry Irvine
Luther Cudworth	Jack Manning
An Elderly Gentleman	Wallace Widdecombe
A Waiter	Leon Forbes
A Drunk	Frank Lyon
A Girl	Dina Merrill
A Man	David Van Winkle

SYNOPSIS: The action passes in any large American city, other than New York. Act I, Scene 1: The living room of a suite in the best hotel. Late Monday night. Scene 2: The same. Some hours later. Act II, Scene 1: A corner of the hotel bar. Tuesday lunch time. Scene 2: Mrs. Matthew's house. Friday evening. Scene 3: A corner of the bar. Late Friday night. Act III, Scene 1: The park. Early Saturday morning. Scene 2: Same as Act I. Late Saturday afternoon.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 29, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

John Van Druten's Latest a Masterpiece

John Van Druten, the master craftsman responsible for such diversified current successes as "The Voice of the Turtle" and "I Remember Mama," has added another little masterpiece of playwriting to his record turnout, which began with his highly successful first play, "Young Woodley," produced in 1926.

Mr. Van Druten's new offering is "The Mermaids Singing," which brought a dressy, enthusiastic and capacity crowd through the wind and rain to the Empire last night. Again he has declined to type himself. "The Mermaids Singing" is as remote in theme from "The Voice of the Turtle" as it is from "Young Woodley."

"In fact, it seems to be a play written with considerable middle-aged apprehension over the possible effect of "The Voice of the Turtle" on the minds and morals of the young and immature. After seeing Mr. Van Druten's new play, I gather that if he had a 18-year-old daughter he wouldn't want her to see "The Voice of the Turtle."

Although "The Mermaids Singing" displays many breaches of convention, it is definitely on the side of morality. Nobility (or at least an enlightened self-interest, which flatters itself that it is a noble act of abnegation) triumphs in the end. Girls who have just reached the voting age are warned not to allow their infatuation for a middle-aged celebrity to carry them away to such an extent that they propose to set up housekeeping with him (and "never bother him at all") in Greenwich Village when he has a wife he loves and two adored daughters in comfortable quarters on Park Ave.

Directed with Care.

As usual with Mr. Van Druten, he has cast and directed his play with care. Indeed, everything about the play is just right, from the sets by Raymond Sovey to the proper incidental music. Outstanding among the performers last night was Beatrice Pearson, as the precocious and self-willed, romantic girl who yearns to escape the grubby, gossipy life of the bored and prying upper class citizenry of an inland city. Miss Pearson is fresh and beautiful, natural and assured, and she has great range of mimetics and voice modulation. She has a juicy role, and she makes the most of it; for the play must largely stand or fall by the way her role is played.

It is the occasion of the return of Walter Abel, an agreeable and ingratiating actor, to Broadway after nine years absence in Hollywood. Playing for only three-minutes takes before the mike and camera instead of in a sustained role of two and a half hours made Mr. Abel garble his lines several times last night. He was no good otherwise, however, that the audience forgave him. But I don't think he should be forgiven for stepping out of character, as he once did, to laugh at his own mistakes. No player in a straight play is big enough to do that, as Mr. Van Druten probably has told him already. Mr. Abel is a graying playwright in search of his youth in the play.

Others in Cast.

And there is the charming and talented Frieda Inescourt in the role of Miss Pearson's mother; the pert and assured Lois Wilson, as an undistinguished actress who was once the playwright's mistress and now has minor roles in his plays; and there are minor roles well played by Jane Hoffman, Walter Starkey, Jack Manning, Wallace Widdecombe, Arthur Griffin, Harry Irving, Leon Forbes, Frank Lyon, Dina Merrill and David Van Winkle.

The title is from T. S. Eliot's sardonic poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which makes pitying fun of the romantic dreams of straight-laced, ineffectual, middle-aged little man, who hears mermaids singing and other music while in the throes of love.

Mr. Van Druten also pokes quite a bit of sly compassionate fun at his playwright, who fancies he is growing stale and wishes to get in touch with the younger generation to see what they are thinking and feeling, lest he get into a rut of writing light, bright plays of sophisticated love.

He Meets Youth.

During the off-Broadway tryouts of one of his plays, a girl in, say, Zenith, Ohio, in spite of the fact that she is engaged to a sound and agreeable naval officer, seizes upon him as the prince on a white charger who will carry her away to an enchanted castle — although she doesn't put it that way. She is, verbally, sophisticated too. . . . Things go pretty far between her and the playwright before he remembers he has a daughter nearly her age and that young love might be an inconvenience.

The action is almost entirely in the dialog, in which Mr. Van Druten is an expert who makes every line count toward the progress of the play and the solution of the problem. You could hear a pin drop throughout the three acts, except when the real wit of Mr. Van Druten's lines provoked laughter, which it did quite often.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 29, 1945

'The Mermaids Singing' Sprawling Play, Bountifully Produced at Empire.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Clyde Fitch once had five plays running simultaneously on Broadway and Avery Hopwood had four. Give John van Druten a few more seasons and he will be in the same company, for he is gradually creeping up. Already represented by two booming properties in 45th street he now comes along with his third play, "The Mermaids Singing," presented last evening at the Empire.

"The Mermaids Singing" has its merits as valid entertainment, but it is a sprawling play. It is frequently a listless one and it falls off badly in the fins' act. On the credit side, it offers some perceptive writing, some bold and bright dialogue, a genuinely charming performance from Beatrice Pearson and a bountiful production from Alfred de Liagre Jr.

For two-thirds of the way "The Mermaids Singing" is a comedy of a certain adroitness as the author of "The Voice of the Turtle" and "I Remember Mama" writes of sex, love, infidelity, recapture and rejuvenation, but not necessarily in the order named. In the final act his play gets away from him completely and the closing scenes provide heavy going, indeed.

Van Druten moves into the Empire with the story of the infatuation of a starry-eyed girl for a famous playwright twice her age. He is married and has two daughters. She meets him during the out-of-town tryout of his new play and the notion of a romance with one so young and so pretty as Dee Matthews appeals to him in that it gives him the assurance that he hasn't gone beyond the stage and the age for that sort of thing. But in his final decision, one influenced by conscience and by an instinct for self-protection, he rejects the girl and sends her back to her adoring young ensign.

Notwithstanding the precision of the author's direction and the glibness of his writing as he comments upon illicit love, "The Mermaids Singing" doesn't hold together. Certainly it doesn't in its final act and it is not in the same world with the two Van Druten plays five blocks to the north. The principal characters are not too credible in themselves and there are several extraneous characters that mean nothing to the story and do nothing for the play.

Beatrice Pearson, a steadily advancing young actress, is extraordinarily good as the impulsive and celebrity-struck girl who throws herself at the visiting playwright. Walter Abel plays that complicated fellow with a good deal of restraint and skill. Frieda Inescort brings more of her serene and detached playing to the role of the girl's mother. Lois Wilson and Jack Manning come through nicely in secondary parts. Raymond Sovey's hotel room gives you the feeling that you're in Boston's Ritz, looking down upon the Public Gardens.

"The Mermaids Singing," because of the prestige of its author and the play's general subject matter, will undoubtedly run at the Empire, but it reveals John van Druten badly off form.

Journal American

NOVEMBER 29, 1945

'Mermaids Singing' Opens at the Empire

I heard the mermaids singing, act by act,
I do not think that they will sing to me;
I like the voice of the turtle better...
T. S. ELIOT/R. G.

By ROBERT GARLAND

Lo and behold, there comes a period in every successful playwright's career when he just has to write a play about a successful playwright. John van Druten, successful playwright, has been no longer getting around to it than his conspicious contemporaries. The result of his playwriting about a successful playwright is to be seen, heard and admired only in moderation at the Empire Theatre.

As the author of "Young Woodley" and "There's Always Juliet," "The Distaff Side" and "Old Acquaintance," "The Damask Cheek" and "The Voice of the Turtle," Mr. van Druten has every right to dramatize his profession and set that dramatization up on a lighted stage for you and me to see. This he has done, in three acts and more than twice that many scenes. But, I fear, mostly for his own amazement.

For his own amazement as a successful playwright. Everything even remotely connected with playwriting has gone into "The Mermaids Singing." The sucessful playwright himself, in person. His wife. His children. His leading lady. His bobby-sox admirer. His bobby-sox admirer's mother. His bobby-sox admirer's boyfriends. His worshipful public. His critical critics. His conscientious conscience.

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Female Go-Getter

If, as a successful playwright's play about a successful playwright, "The Mermaids Singing" has what passes for a hero, that hero is the playwright's conscientious conscience. In the new arrival at the old Empire, Clement Waterlow's still, small voice, rather than Clement Waterlow himself, is the only thing the fabled creatures of the title have to sing about. And that is perilously unpredictable.

It all transpires when the playwriting Clement Waterlow exposes his latest play in a "large American city other than New York" for a prior-to-Broadway tryout. In what looks remarkably like Boston's Ritz-Carlton Hotel overlooking Boston's Public Garden, our make-believe successful playwright is sore beset by a bevy of female go-getters, beginning with his players and ending with his public.

The sorest besetter of the bevy, the most persistent of the female go-getters, is Dee Matthews, a bewitched bobby-soxer who won't take "Maybe" for an answer. Dee, with her family, her friends and her fiance all registering vociferous disapproval, wants what she wants when she wants it. What she wants is Clement Waterlow, successful playwright of successful plays like those of John van Druten.

• • •

Praise La Pearson

No wisecrack is intended when, again borrowing from Ed Wynn, it is pointed out that John van Druten must have written "The Mermaids Singing" for his own amazement. It is as obvious as it is true. The author of "The Voice of the Turtle" and the dramatizer of "Mama's Bank Account" is having himself a time in his successful playwright's play about a successful playwright. And his players try to help him.

Only intermittently do they succeed. As the Clement Waterlow who writes unorthodox plays in haste and worries about their iconoclasm at leisure, Walter Abel gives a studied and unreal performance that adds little but confusion to an on-stage situation which is confused enough without his contribution. Lois Wilson and Frieda Inescort, as player and public, untangle matters not at all. To the contrary!

When the mummers have stopped their talking and the mermaids have stopped their singing, it is young Beatrice Pearson who has acted circles around her more celebrated coworkers. Miss Pearson's Dee Matthews, who would rather have a married playwright than an unmarried soldier or sailor, is a triumph of player over playwright . . . "The Mermaids Singing" is not John van Druten at his best. His truth is less brilliant than his fiction.

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New York Post

NOVEMBER 29, 1945

'The Mermaids Singing' No. 3 for John van Druten

By Wilella Waldorf

With two hits, "The Voice of the Turtle" and "I Remember Mama," already running on Broadway, John van Druten is celebrating his twentieth anniversary as a playwright by humming an old tune so fondly and so cheerfully that it sometimes seems almost new. The name of the familiar little piece is "The Mermaids Singing" and it came to the Empire last night.

Here we have once more the story of the middle-aged but still charming dramatist occupying a hotel suite in a nearby city during the tryout of his latest comedy about upper-class adultery. Very sophisticated, terribly sexy, completely unimportant. But slick. In fact, designed almost exclusively for New York where monogamy is regarded as an eccentricity.

After the customary chatter about the play (in the play) and whether it is shocking or whether it isn't, the dramatist, who has often heard the siren song, hears it again, sung this time by a twenty-year-old girl who draws a little and would probably have gone abroad to study had the war not intervened.

"The Mermaids Singing" depends for suspense wholly upon the fact that most of the audience is naturally going to hang around to find out whether they ever actually have an affair or not. The girl has an anxious mother who isn't too keen on the idea and a fiance in the Navy who is definitely opposed to it. The playwright, married for sixteen years, has a wife and two daughters in New York.

But this is a play by John van Druten and everybody, or nearly everybody, remembers what happened in "The Voice of the Turtle."

Theatrical Chit-Chat

Given plenty of opportunity to talk about the theatre, the author has a grand time picturing a successful playwright in the throes of an out-of-town tryout. A number of extraneous but amusing characters are introduced to give some idea of the sort of thing a Broadway writing man is up against in the provinces, and there's the merry but not precisely unexpected scene in which the notices are read after the opening and the usual good-natured cracks launched at the local critics.

While this is going on, it seems pleasant enough, especially to a Broadway first-night audience that knows, and cares, about theatrical tittle-tattle and chit-chat. By the time the third act has arrived, however, it is evident that Mr. van Druten is merely pulling off a rather superficial little charade of no great moment except that it does permit the author to greet his twentieth anniversary as a playwright with three shows on the boards, all of which he directed himself.

He has given us so many pleasant evenings in the theatre during those twenty years that we are quite willing to let "The Mermaids Singing" be set down as a reasonably diverting spree on the part of a playwright who's reached a dignified middle-age and longs now and then to feel young again.

Walter Abel has come back from Hollywood to play the dramatist, making him a more likeable fellow than the character really is if you begin to take him apart. And there is an especially attractive performance as the girl by a young actress named Beatrice Pearson.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 29, 1945

'Mermaids Singing,' or 'The Voice Of van Druten Gets a Little Thin'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "The Mermaids Singing" John van Druten continues his improvisations upon the sex theme—this time writing a comedy about a modern young woman who goes to a man's apartment and brings her own etchings. The play is like one of those new plastic soap bubbles; it is light and airy, it bobbles up and down . . . and it lasts a long time.

Too long, I am afraid, although it is written and acted with skill. In "The Voice of the Turtle" Mr. van Druten ran a bedroom skit into three acts and made it the most diverting comedy of a couple of seasons. In his new affair his indelicacies seem a little too delicate. The girl wants to and the man wants to but nobody does, and somehow, base fellow that I am, I think everybody would have more fun, including the characters in the play, if they did along about the end of the second act.

This, however, would have made it useless to have a third act, so I guess I'm no good as a play doctor. Or am I?

Sophisticated Dramatist.

The man, engagingly played by Walter Abel—even though he did have a touch of the first-night jumps—is a playwright attending the out-of-town tryout of his new comedy. The program says the locale is any city outside New York, and it probably is Philadelphia but might be Davenport, Iowa, or Hot Springs, Ark.

This playwright makes stage pieces about sex, just like Mr. van Druten, and he defends himself against those who believe the drama should be important and socially significant by gently observing that quite a few people like sex. He writes plays about infidelity, and he thinks infidelity is here to stay, even in real life. He is not above a little himself, once in a while.

So, when an utterly charming 20-year-old native of whatever town he is in flings herself at him in a girlish and ladylike way, he figures why not? It does not matter that she's engaged to a nice young ensign, or that he has a wife and two children, or that the girl has a mother who is worried about her.

He figures why not, that is, until the last act, when he suffers an attack of nobility and sends the lass back, unharmed, to a normal, decent life. He is mildly surprised to discover that he, the sophisticate, could have an old-fashioned idea.

Lightly Pleasant.

Mr. van Druten has filled his bubble with many light pleasantries. Some of them touch upon the serious drama in amusing fashion, but most of them deal with whether to or whether not to. He has had to fill his stage—which includes a hotel apartment, a home and a park—with other people and they all are amusingly drawn and played even when they have just been hauled in to sit around for a while.

The best thing of all in "The Mermaids Singing" is Beatrice Pearson's playing of the girl. She is so right, so forthright, so feminine and so charming as to be one of the season's acting delights. Lois Wilson as a rueful actress (a more advanced cousin of the actress in "Voice of the Turtle") is quite pleasant, and so are Frieda Inescort as the mother and the others of the company.

Mr. van Druten is one of the very best directors currently operating—but at the Empire Theatre last night it seemed to me that he was somewhat bemused; bemused by the voice of van Druten.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 29, 1945

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Conversation Piece

JOHN VAN DRUTEN considers a possible peccadillo with loquacious interest in "The Mermaids Singing." His new conversation piece at the Empire spins the subject of adultery around, permitting a spectator to glimpse various facets of an amatory adventure which the protagonist of the play likes to think a "treat." The author has written sprightly dialogue for the occasion. He has drawn some amusing small-city characters, who have various reactions to the pursuit of a middle-aged playwright by a fresh young maiden of the community. Unfortunately, the near-affair is far from entertaining or instructive in itself. Adultery takes quite a beating in the comedy.

* * *

At best "The Mermaids Singing" is literate and disarming. Through the playwright in his play Van Druten serves notice immediately that he is not particularly concerned with any significant action. He sticks to that line stubbornly. There is a certain conflict of temperaments in the course of seven scenes. There is a small commotion in the ending involving sudden and unexpected visits to the dramatist's hotel room and a long-distance call from his wife. Most of the work is dedicated to polite speeches about getting in the hay extra-legally and the recapturing of youth by intimate relationship with youth. After a while the subject becomes pretty well exhausted.

* * *

The occasional commentary on provincial conventions is much more beguiling than the blandishments of a naive mermaid. In his staging van Druten seems to have found this so himself. A scene in which a mother entertains the playwriting celebrity to cover up the suspected infatuation of her daughter for him has a series of delightful verbal tilts, as the apologist for adultery is heckled by an ancient professor and a G.I. on furlough with an overweening social consciousness. The lines in "The Mermaids Singing" generally warrant more dramatic substance than they ornament.

* * *

Walter Abel has the leading role of the author of a somewhat daring play, trying out on the road. He played it zealously, but he rarely convinces one that he is or is not on the make for a youngster who falls for him. Beatrice Pearson, in the latter part, is easy to look at and more than a little sympathetic, but her romantic crisis never becomes very important. Frieda Inescort is fine as a somewhat frightened mother, and Lois Wilson has a good if somewhat irrelevant bit as an actress who finds that a "treat" is not altogether satisfactory. Jane Hoffman, Harry Irvine and Jack Manning turn in comical portrayals of the heroine's friends and neighbors, and Walter Starkey is all right as her fiance. The sets, incidentally, are in Raymond Sovey's best manner. The title is from a T. S. Eliot poem.

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PM Evening

NOVEMBER 29, 1945

—Kronenberger—

The Song Is A Bit Off-Key

PM Reviews

THE MERMAIDS SINGING

This fiendish season's withering touch has not even spared the most engaging and adroit playwright of recent years. There are very engaging passages in *The Mermaids Singing*, and there are very adroit ones. The van Druten signature remains recognizable. But it is a sprawling one, and it runs downhill. For two acts, fortified by Mr. van Druten's expert staging and Beatrice Pearson's uncommonly skilful performance, *The Mermaids Singing* manages to keep going; slithers, but does not actually slump. But in the last act, its saving wit and buoyancy spent, its story mired in talk and terminal scene-writing, the play comes to grief. The final effect is of something not quite enjoyable enough.

The main weakness in *The Mermaids Singing* is, perhaps, Mr. van Druten's too wavering and discursive treatment of his theme. The theme is that of the somewhat rueful middle-aged man and the romantic, infatuated young girl. It is one of the classic themes of literature and the theater, and in that sense can never be damned as hackneyed. There is always potential life in it. It is, moreover, a theme with which Mr. van Druten is well equipped to deal. With his rooted and delicate comic sense of life, he is in no danger of over-simplifying or over-sentimentalizing it; he is able to see it for what it is. For this particular portrayal, he has chosen a married playwright who, while his new show is having its pre-Broadway try-out in a city like Baltimore or Boston, meets a young engaged girl. The man has been wondering a little whether the sands of romance are running out for him; the girl is beguiled by his glamorous name and excited by his sophistication.

* * *

Doubtless the meetings between two such people are always simpler matters to deal with than the matings or the partings; but Mr. van Druten has not attacked the situation with enough single-mindedness, with a sharp enough viewpoint, or with anything like enough concern for tone. He has brought too much else into the play besides the love story. It was legitimate, even helpful, to include the "small town" complications of the girl being seen with the man, and being talked about. Such social comedy is in perfect keeping with such a theme. But even here Mr. van Druten has not shown his usual finesse, and has tossed in such broadly drawn minor characters that they themselves seem like burlesques, and their roles not comic but farcical. In the same way, Mr. van Druten has had his fun with playwrights, and though sometimes it is very good fun, the joke wears thin and the kidding loses its edge.

All this badly mars the play's tone; all this harmfully interrupts the play's story. And the story itself is not too evenly projected. It is, at the least, very arguable that this sort of love story should be largely attacked either from the man's side or from the girl's. Here probably, what with Mr. van Druten's Prufrockian title, it should be from the man's—from the ironic angle of the middle-aged male who hears "the mermaids singing"—but not for him. Mr. van Druten has, however, chosen to keep the two main roles balanced, and with that choice there is no strong reason to quarrel. But he has not given to the two roles an equal effectiveness. The girl comes off; Mr. van Druten is understanding, mellow and tenderly amused about her. But the man's role does not come off, partly, I think, because Clement Waterlow never seems to feel either a truly Prufrockian uneasiness or a proper romantic stirring. Moreover, the mermaids do sing for him and it is he, in the end, who turns a deaf ear.

* * *

There is only space to add that in his first two acts Mr. van Druten's dialogue and story-telling are often amusing, gay and touched with insight; though often, too, they have a forced and make-talk air. But in winding up the romance that is never consummated, Mr. van Druten wears everything down with a succession of very dull scenes.

Miss Pearson easily wins all the acting honors. She has, to be sure, the best part; but she plays it beautifully, with sensibility and understanding, and the happy asset of good looks. Walter Abel handles the playwright's role with experienced competence, but nothing much more. Lois Wilson, Frieda Inescort, Walter Starkey, Jane Hoffman and Jack Manning fill the minor parts adequately.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER